

April of this year, there were more than 1,700 VA vacancies, and more than 1,500 of those positions were considered critical to public health and safety.

That is a massive problem that needs immediate attention by the administration. These vacancies are not just numbers; they have serious consequences for our veterans who need care.

When the VA is understaffed, it means longer wait times. It means veterans unable to see the specialists they need. It means overstretched doctors.

Overworked doctors means mistakes are more likely and veterans are not getting the quality care they deserve.

Imagine a doctor tells an Ohio veteran she needs an MRI. Well, if there is no MRI tech at that facility because they have not hired one, she has to wait longer for the test and diagnosis. She might have to find someone to drive her to another town.

The last thing we ought to be doing is making it harder for these men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country to get the care they need. We owe all of our veterans—and the families who support them—our gratitude, our respect, and the best healthcare in the world. That means recruiting talented doctors, nurses, and other staff members has to be a priority for the VA.

The agency must improve outreach to prospective employees to show that it is a desirable place to work. It needs to demonstrate that employee's voices, including those of whistleblowers, will be heard and protected when necessary. Future VA employees need to know that all efforts by VA workers to improve the quality of services provided to our veterans will be encouraged, appreciated, and acted on.

We absolutely need to ensure that we are holding the workers who care for our veterans and servicemembers to the highest standards—but that is not enough.

We can improve the quality of care by the VA by making sure it is properly and fully staffed. That is currently not the case, and I will continue to press the VA to provide answers as to why more than 1,700 positions in Ohio—positions that should be filled by Americans dedicated to serving our veterans—are vacant.

When our servicemembers return home, they should be able to focus on spending time with loved ones and rejoining their communities, not worrying about whether they will be able to get the quality healthcare they deserve.

#### TRIBUTE TO STEPHEN SCHLEY

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, for centuries, families and communities throughout Maine were sustained by healthy working forests. During his 32 years with Pingree Associates, including 28 as president, Stephen Schley has exemplified the stewardship that defines Maine's forest products industry.

His retirement provides an opportunity to celebrate his many contributions to the economy, environment, and the communities that make up the great State of Maine.

It can truly be said that Steve's commitment to Maine and our forests is in his DNA. In 1820, the year Maine became a State, Massachusetts shipping businessman David Pingree began investing in Maine forestlands. Nearly two centuries later, as a descendant of that visionary leader, Steve has helped to make Pingree Associates a model of sustainable forestry, environmental responsibility, economic development, and public access.

Today Pingree Associates' lands in Maine approach 1 million acres. Steve has always recognized that with those great holdings comes great responsibility, and he has always measured every initiative by its benefit to the communities and people of Maine. He has devoted time and effort to engaging with organizations statewide that seek to provide support for these communities and their development, both inside and outside his role in forest management.

Just a few examples from a long career demonstrate his commitment. In the 1990s, under Steve's leadership, the Pingree lands in Maine became the largest forest in North America to earn certification for sustainable forestry practices. In 2001, he guided the agreement that established a 750,000-acre conservation easement, also the largest on our continent, to ensure continued public recreational access to undeveloped woodlands. In recent years, as the industry has sought to address the challenges of a changing economy, Steve has been a leader in supporting research into forest bioproducts and developing new economic opportunities for the entire forest products industry. He has always recognized the value in engaging with all stakeholders and has worked in cooperation with the University of Maine to foster the next generation of foresters. Indeed, he worked to establish the endowment of the University's Forestry School, recognizing the unique perspective and unparalleled training that comes with working in the forests of Maine.

The people of Maine have always been faithful stewards of our forests because we appreciate their tremendous value to our way of life. As president of Pingree Associates, Steve Schley has honored our heritage and helped to shape the economic, environmental, and recreational future of our entire State. I commend him for his dedication to Maine's natural treasures and our way of life and thank him for his years of stewardship.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize Steve Schley who is stepping down as president of Pingree Associates after nearly three decades of leadership later this month. Eight generations after his descendant initiated this effort, Steve Schley has, in his 32 years of service both to Pingree

Associates, of which he was president for 28 years, and to the State of Maine, continued a tradition of leadership in the development and fiscal health of Maine's forest products industry as well as the sustainability of Maine's forests. Steve's retirement provides an opportunity to honor his wide array of accomplishments and contributions to the State of Maine—all achieved in the spirit and essence of his lineage.

In the year 1820, Maine, as included in the the Missouri Compromise, was ushered into the Union as a new State. That same year, a prominent Massachusetts shipping merchant named David Pingree initiated what would become a historic and indispensable string of investments in Maine forestlands. Over the next nearly 200 years, sudden growth and advancement of Maine's forest product industry, and thus statewide economic development, blossomed from the easement agreements signed and purchases made of Maine forest land by the Pingree family.

Today Pingree Associates is in possession of close to 1 million acres of Maine forest land, bringing a great burden of responsibility upon the president of the association. In every respect, Steve has thrived under this burden. During his tenure as president, he has undertaken initiatives to revitalize Maine's struggling wood-products industry by collaborating with the University of Maine's Forest Bio-products Research Institute to help nurture the next generation of innovators and leaders in the bioproducts industry, setting the stage for the development and integration of sustainable, forward-thinking forest products. By "paying it forward" through the youth of Maine, he is ensuring that his integrity and hard work will continue to live on through these kids for generations to come. Steve's sustainability and conservation efforts were not limited to just ensuring a bright future. Back in 2001, when I was Governor, I announced Steve's success in closing the largest forestland conservation easement in the history of the United States between Pingree Associates and the New England Forestry Foundation, which independently protected 762,192 acres from development and opened up the land to recreation for Mainers and all U.S. citizens for time immemorial.

Because of Steve's hard work and leadership as president of Pingree Associates, Mainers of all ages will continue to benefit from his successes in Maine's forest industry, as well as in conserving land for their recreation. Steve has honored our collective heritage as well as his own, and I thank him for his friendship and his many contributions towards bettering our State.

## ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT  
GENERAL KAREN E. DYSON

• Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I wish to honor an exceptional officer in the U.S. Army. LTG Karen E. Dyson will retire in July after more than 37 years of distinguished service to the Army and our great Nation. General Dyson's long and distinguished career admirably culminates as military deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Financial Management and Comptroller. This is the highest military position within that office.

For nearly four decades, General Dyson has personified the Army values of duty, integrity, and selfless service to our Nation's defense. She comes from a legacy of selfless service, as her father served as a special forces officer in Germany. Lieutenant General Dyson began her own legacy upon graduation and commissioning as a second lieutenant into the regular Army, Finance Branch, from the ROTC program at Southwest Missouri State University. Her extraordinary career is a testament to her hard work and dedication; she is an exemplary role model and mentor who made Army history as the first female finance officer to obtain the rank of lieutenant general.

Lieutenant General Dyson has commanded soldiers at all levels through brigade, leading soldiers in peacetime, stability operations, and war. During her command of the European-based 266th Finance Command, she deployed with her troops in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq. Her command funded each and every Army mission within the contingency operation, the infrastructure of all military operating bases, and critical equipment that ensured warfighters were ready to fight. She also commanded the 208th Finance Battalion during Operation Joint Guard and Operation Joint Forge in Bosnia; and the 66th Finance Detachment in the 101st Airborne Division during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia.

Lieutenant General Dyson was an integral part of the of the White House team during her time serving as the chief of staff and comptroller, White House Military Office. She is also a familiar and respected presence in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. During her time as the military deputy for budget and the director of the Army budget under the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Financial Management and Comptroller, she dedicated herself to engaging Congress on important financial issues for the Army, answering questions that ensured transparency and understanding of the Army's funding requirements. She served in numerous positions within the Pentagon to include the chief of the Army Coalition Provisional Authority Support Team, the director of Business Operations Office of Business Transformation, the director of oper-

ations and support Army Budget Office and the executive officer to the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Financial Management and Comptroller, and to the Under Secretary of the Army. She influenced the way the Army viewed auditability and was the driving force behind numerous initiatives to make every dollar count, ensuring accountability to Congress and our Nation's taxpayers.

Together with her husband James Chamberlain, a retired Air Force officer, she will undoubtedly continue her service to our Nation in some capacity following her retirement. On behalf of the State of West Virginia and the U.S. Senate and a grateful nation, I congratulate LTG Karen E. Dyson on her retirement from the U.S. Army. I wish Karen and Jim the best in their future endeavors and the next chapter of their lives.●

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT  
COLONEL REBECCA B. McELWAIN

• Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to an exceptional officer in the U.S. Army. LTC Rebecca B. McElwain has served admirably as a senior budget integrator for the Assistant Secretary of the Army, Financial Management and Comptroller, for the past year.

Lieutenant Colonel McElwain began her career in North Dakota where she spent time as a medic in the Army Reserves, later transferring to the Minnesota National Guard. After graduating with a bachelor's of science in business administration from North Dakota State University in 1997, she received a commission into the Finance Corps.

LTC Rebecca McElwain's earliest Active-Duty assignment was with the 125th Finance Battalion in Hawaii, where she assumed her first company-grade command and participated in Asia-Pacific training exercises such as Cobra Gold in Thailand. After her time in Hawaii, she transitioned to Schweinfurt, Germany, where she assumed detachment command in the 106th Finance Battalion and deployed her unit to Kosovo in support of Task Force Falcon. She also served as a military mentor in support of the U.S. Ambassador's efforts to encourage Kosovar women to assume leadership positions in Kosovo's developing government.

After her return from Kosovo, she moved across Germany to support U.S. Army Europe transformation initiatives as the 266th Finance Command executive officer. Shortly after, she was selected for graduate school and attended Hawaii Pacific University, where she earned a master's degree in business administration with an international finance focus. After graduation, she returned to Germany, activated and assumed command of the 106th Financial Management Company, deploying her unit in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom to establish a new headquarters in southern Iraq.

While in Germany, Lieutenant Colonel McElwain was selected to attend the Australian Command and Staff College, a joint military school.

During her time in Australia, she earned an additional master's degree in strategy and management from the University of New South Wales and attended classes with 182 students from 22 different nations, to include China, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Next, Lieutenant Colonel McElwain served as the chief of financial management security assistance in the CENTCOM J8, supporting the fiscal requirements of 17 security cooperation offices throughout CENTCOM. She also served as a primary member of the CENTCOM operational planning team for Afghanistan transition. As the division G8 comptroller for the 25th Infantry Division, she managed funding for five rapidly deployable brigades and received broad exposure to the ongoing Pacific partnership efforts within the PACOM footprint, as well as joint force engagements.

Lieutenant Colonel McElwain's husband, James, has deep family roots in West Virginia and served as an Army ordnance officer. Since leaving the military, he spends his time as a health and fitness consultant and independent chef. Together they have a 13-year-old son, Andrew, who enjoys Boy Scouts, loves all types of sports, and keeps them on their toes.

Throughout her career, Lieutenant Colonel McElwain has positively impacted her soldiers, peers, and superiors. Her extraordinary career is a testament to her hard work and dedication. Our Nation has been enriched by her leadership, thoughtful judgment, and exemplary work. On behalf of the State of West Virginia and the U.S. Senate and a grateful nation, I join my colleagues today in recognizing and commending Rebecca on her service to our Nation. We wish Rebecca, James, and Andrew all the best as they continue their journey in the Army.●

## MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 10:48 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2581. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to require the provision of social security numbers as a condition of receiving the health insurance premium tax credit.

## MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 2581. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to require the provision of social security numbers as a condition of receiving the health insurance premium tax credit; to the Committee on Finance.